

FROM THE EDITORS

We are pleased to include in this issue a fascinating look into the minds of Alfred Métraux and Thomas Barthel through written correspondence between 1955 and 1961. This paper treats two of the most important figures in Rapa Nui research of the 20th century and reveals the truth behind the “Métraux Notes”. Steven Fischer kindly did a bit of excavation into his copious files and brought forth this grand read, full of insight, envy, toadying, lauding, arrogance, and many revelations. The letters are all from the original correspondence, now in the collection of The Institute of Polynesian Languages and Literatures, much of it donated by Barthel. Most of the letters are in English; those in German and French were translated by Fischer. The bottom line: Métraux’s notes aren’t lost at all.

With regard to Easter Island, there are currently at least two “camps” of archaeological thought: One deals with whether or not rats were responsible for the loss of all of the palm trees on the island (Hunt & Lipo, 2006) *versus* the belief that the islanders cut the trees down themselves — and the date of initial settlement of Easter Island is no less an important aspect of the debate. A great deal of ink has been spilled recently arguing for late settlement; *i.e.*, after 1200 CE — a date that is much too late in time, according to many specialists (*e.g.*, Flenley & Bahn, 2003). In light of these conflicting opinions, we present in this issue of the *RNJ* several papers that deal with these problems. As for the infamous rat theory postulated by Hunt and Lipo, Barry Rollet (2008) states,

While this argument is attractive because it absolves Polynesians from having intentionally deforested the island, it is contradicted by multiple lines of evidence.... First, although rats may have slowed regrowth of Easter’s palm forests, they could not have felled the mature trees. These had a life span of up to 2000 years, yet the palms mostly vanished within a few centuries following the arrival of humans and rats. This draws attention to the role of humans. ... Evidence for cutting and burning the palms is found in the form of numerous palm stumps, many of which are burnt. Fire would have posed a severe threat to Easter’s palms, greater than the threat of rats.

The paper by Kathryn Klar and Terry Jones, “On Myths, Mythmakers and Post-modern Science: A Comment on Jeanne Arnold’s Dismissal of a Prehistoric Polynesian Contact Event in Southern California”, is a response to a critique by Arnold (2007), who uses Hunt and Lipo’s controversial dates as “proof” of late colonization. Klar and Jones provide archaeological and linguistic evidence in support of prehistoric diffusion between Polynesia and the Chumash and Gabrielino of southern California, arguing that it was from this contact that Native Californians learned the technique for sewn-plank boat construction (along with linguistic referents) and the crafting of a particular style of two-piece fish hook from Polynesians.

A paper by Marshall Weisler and Roger Green complements the one by Klar and Jones: “The Many Sides of Polynesian Archaeology” presents the case for a pre-1200 CE colonization of Rapa Nui, in contrast to researchers such as Hunt and Lipo (2006) who posit a later date. Weisler and

Green contend that, by rejecting dates that make a peak prior to 1200 CE, these earlier dates are removed from consideration as indicators of habitation because of a lower degree of statistical likelihood (Hunt & Lipo 2006: Figure 2). As covered in a paper by Wallin and Martinson-Wallin (*in press*), who have dated several later-period *ahu* to 1200 CE, thus raising the question that, if the settlers didn’t arrive until 1200, it leaves very little time for the Rapanui to settle in, get established, and reach the point where they were organized enough to construct major *ahu*. To round out the discussion, Brett Shepherdson, *et al.*, in an interesting and related paper, provide mathematical data that also refutes the late settlement hypothesis.

And there’s more! Alexander Baer, Thegn Ladefoged, Chris Stevenson, and Sonia Haoa have submitted a paper on “The Surface Rock Gardens of Prehistoric Rapa Nui” and Christopher Reichl has contributed an article on the rock art of Hawai’i. And speaking of rock art, Paul Horley (in collaboration with Georgia Lee) has sent us a fascinating article in which he has not only theorized the implementation of color pigments amongst the petroglyphs of ‘Orongo but has even managed, using computer technology, to enhance images of Hoa Haka Nana I’a and ‘Orongo rock art to reveal what they might have looked like when they were painted in all their glory for ceremonial purposes. This may be the first paper to address this hypothesis so fully.

Elsewhere in the issue we finally devote a “Getting to Know You” to the unsung heroes of the EIF and the *RNJ* — Georgia Lee and Frank Morin; we sadly say goodbye to Gonzalo Figueroa; there is a Look Back feature by Bouverie Clark dating from 1822; and, in addition to “What’s New” with the EIF, Easter Island, the Pacific, and elsewhere, this issue of the *RNJ* features an important letter to the editor from Paul Bahn & John Flenley; reviews of books and an exhibition of Easter Island wood carvings in Paris; material about the Pacific Arts Festival held in America Samoa; and we even take a trip down memory lane to what the *RNJ* was covering twenty years ago.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the *Rapa Nui Journal*, as it marks a transitional phase in editorship and by extension the continuing vision of the Easter Island Foundation.

Georgia Lee & Shawn McLaughlin
Senior Editors

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